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A clearer vision

Port Colborne is setting its course for the next four years, and beyond.
Page 3

Keeping pace

A 105-year-old keeps ticking with the aid of her new pacemaker.
Page 19

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Cat-astrophe averted



A Canadian Niagara Power worker helps free a cat stranded atop Alexandra St. in Port Colborne. See story on page 2.



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UPFRONT

■ **CAT RESCUE:** Port Colborne feline rescued from perch atop a utility pole

Stranded cat goes viral

GREG FURMINGER
QMI Agency Niagara

It could have been a catstrophe, but it all ended purrfectly well for a feline stranded atop a hydro pole in Port Colborne Jan. 20.

But for the local fire department — “We were getting hammered,” said Port Colborne fire prevention officer Mike Bendia.

After the plight of the orange cat bit social media, the local fire department got calls from across Ontario for people demanding firefighters get involved in bringing the cat back to terra firma.

“This one just went so viral, so quick,” Bendia said.

“I even got a call from a lady in Kingston,” he said, adding another woman, too, from Barrie was demanding action.

“People were getting upset, but there was nothing we could do.”

The kitty’s plight was monitored by a woman who provided regular updates of the action on Alexandra St. to Port Colborne Feline Initiative, which saw its Facebook post on poor kitty sent out numerous times through cyberspace.

The feline initiative’s Facebook post was shared by dozens of people by the 11 a.m. — as of that Tuesday afternoon it had been reposted 90 times.

Kristi Mallinson Vogel, president and founder of the nearly six-year-old charitable organization that monitors more than a hundred feral cat colonies in Port Colborne and operates a spay and neutering program, said she was first notified of the troubled cat at about 8 a.m.

It brought to mind a cat stranded atop a pole in Peterborough.

ough.

Except in this case, the temperatures were frigid.

“We couldn’t just stand by and let happen again,” she said.

That’s why she posted the cat’s ordeal on its Facebook site, which is followed by more than 1,000 people. “People reacted they way we hoped they would,” said Mallinson Vogel.

People who followed the kitty online made regular recommendations on who to call to get it down, including the humane society, the city’s tree pruners, the fire department and hydro workers.

Pot shots were taken at some of the agencies, including to suggest they had turned their backs on the animal.

Welland and District Humane Society may respond, but it will not get involved in the rescue of animals from privately-owned utility poles. Its employees also are not trained for such rescues around live wires.

People, however, are not discouraged from reporting animals in distress.

“Safety has to come first for our people, too,” the fire department’s Bendia said, adding there are also times its personnel can’t take action at a fire scene until hydro crews arrive.

“CNP has all the proper equipment, the grounding gear, the gloves,” he said.

Fire Chief Tom Cartwright said only if hydro crews shut down power near the cat would it attempt a rescue.

“It just takes one wrong move and you’re dead,” he said of making contact with high-tension wires.

Both the chief and Bendia suggested the cat would have come down on its own.

Bendia said he went out to investigate for what originally was called in to the fire department as a cat stuck in a tree. When he got there he said a dog was barking at it.

Canadian Niagara Power was prepared to cut the power so that firefighters could remove the cat, but just before a truck could roll out of the fire station, the utility company called to inform that it had rescued the animal.

A feline initiative Facebook post just past 11:30 a.m. read: “Cat is down and safe! Thanks so much for lending your voices to ensure this had a happy ending.”

A later Facebook gallery of rescue photos had been shared 120 times as of 4 p.m.

Facebook followers immediately showed CNP workers with praise, some suggesting that thank you cards be sent to all involved in retrieving the cat.

Canadian Niagara Power communications manager Kristine Carmichael said it is “not standard practice” to rescue animals, but in this case concern for the cat and the potential problems it could cause being so close to hydro lines led to the decision to cause a brief interruption of service for about 26 to 30 of its customers.

It was unknown who the cat belongs to, or what its name is. It had no telltale mark that it had come into contact with the Port Colborne Feline Initiative.

Based on its colouring, Mallinson Vogel suggested the cat could be called Morris — as in 9/11 cat food’s finicky feline who was big in 1970s TV commercials.

greg.furminger@sunmedia.ca
Twitter: @GregAtTheBr

■ **BUDGET:** Port Colborne city staff recommends 3.52% tax increase



Vale Health and Wellness Centre.

Vale wellness centre not so healthy

MARYANNE FIRTH
QMI Agency Niagara

New hires, marina improvements and fixes to the two-year-old Vale Health and Wellness Centre are all included in the draft 2015 budget presented to Port Colborne council last week.

During the first budget meeting of the season, community and corporate services director Peter Senese provided a detailed overview of the staff-proposed budget, which includes a recommended tax increase of 3.52%.

The document proposes two staff members be hired to continually update Port Colborne’s asset management plan, documenting the condition and expected lifespan of everything owned by the city. The provincial government requires that the plan be updated annually.

The more than \$96,000 cost will be paid using capital funds, which will be freed up by a conditional grant Port Colborne is expected to receive, Senese said.

The budget also includes more than \$30,000 in proposed improvements to Sugarloaf Harbour Marina, as well as \$50,000 to dredge the marina and assist with the area’s weed problem.

The latter cost will be paid

for through provincial funding and reserve funds set aside for dredging in 2014.

While several budget items on the draft document drew questions, it was the handful of asks for improvements to the Vale centre, which opened in February 2013, that seemed to rouse the most eyebrows.

“This is a brand new building. This floors me, honestly. It does,” Ward 3 Coun. Bea Kenny said, visibly frustrated as she looked through the budget additions.

She expressed her concern about the number of complaint she’s received not only from the public but also from her own family members about the condition of the facility, which has been plagued by a leaky roof among other issues.

Bon Hanson, the city’s director of engineering and operations, said roof repairs will be completed once the weather warms and will be covered under the facility’s warranty.

There are, however, still modifications that need to be made to the centre’s air handling unit and ductwork, which had issues with snow getting inside, he said.

That cost, estimated at close to \$40,000, will fall on Port Colborne’s shoulders because the unit was built according to the

city’s detailed design.

Another large issue in need of correction is the lack of seating in the centre’s dressing rooms, Hanson said, calling it the “No. 1 complaint” heard about the facility.

Council allocated \$18,000 in 2014 to have the dressing room benches extended, but that solution was deemed inadequate, he said.

Staff are now requesting \$60,000 for renovations that include removing concrete barrier walls inside the dressing rooms and installing benches in their place.

Both the air unit repairs and dressing room renovations will be paid for through a reserve fund that contains proceeds from the sale of the Westside Arena and Centennial Pool properties.

Also expected to come out of that reserve is \$42,000 for improvements to the Vale centre community room, including installation of soundproof blinds, a drop ceiling and room dividers, as well as an undetermined amount for speakers in the lower level of Rink 1.

The city will use provincial funding to pay for automatic door openers for Rink 2 at a cost of \$10,000.

maryanne.firth@sunmedia.ca
Twitter: @mfirth@brn

LOCAL NEWS

■ PLANNING

Port Working to set goals for the future

ALLAN BENNER
QMI Agency Niagara

Port Colborne is setting its course for the next four years, and beyond.

City council and staff heard presentations from several community organizations during a strategic planning session in council chambers Saturday.

At the meeting, Port Cares executive director Christine Clark Lafleur discussed the growing demand on the services it provides for residents of all ages.

"Poverty is a very real issue in Port Colborne," she said.

"We know that poverty is not a game, but it is a roll of the dice for a lot of people."

Port Cares site supervisor Amanda Uppier described a scenario of a single mother working at a minimum wage job. After expenses, she said, that single mother would not have enough money to live on.

"She couldn't even completely pay her water bill ... and she hasn't even fed her children yet," Uppier said.

"The reality is there is unemployment and under-employment across the area. ... The reality is there is a high reliance on social assistance programs, with 17.5% of Port Colborne and Watford residents dependent on some form of government transfer payments as their sole income."

"The needs are real and they're rising. There are 1,252 people coming to the food bank and 392 of them are kids."

A year earlier, she added, only 796 people needed the food bank's assistance.

Lafleur asked councillors to keep the impoverished residents in mind when they develop the strategic plan.

She asked them to consider "the opportunities to continue the vibrancy of the community and to look toward improving life for those who have challenges."

Commander Scott Wolfe, from Port Colborne Marine Auxiliary Rescue, discussed the challenges his organization faces as it works to ensure the safety of boaters on Lake Erie.

That includes the loss of manpower as many of their older volunteers retire, while at the same time aging equipment

wears out.

He said POCOMAR will follow the city's example and develop its own strategy "to find efficiencies and manage costs while maintaining the highest possible standard of care for mariners in distress on eastern Lake Erie."

While it would take some planning, Ward 1 Coun. John Mayne suggested possibly adding small fees to the cost of renting a dock or using the boat launch to provide funding for POCOMAR.

Ward 4 Coun. Ron Bodner suggested creating a fundraising arm for the organization, similar to Friends of Roselawn Centre — another organization that was represented during the meeting.

Resident Doug Hart was there and shared his ideas about the city's future and barriers keeping it from growing.

"You have to cut the costs, because who's going to come here if you pay twice as much in taxes as where they live?" he said.

"Look at the factories and offices that have lost jobs," he said, adding schools, churches and retail stores have also closed their doors in the city.

In addition to his job as a city councillor, Bodner was there as a delegate representing Niagara's South Coast Tourism Association.

He said municipal participation is crucial to the long-term success of the volunteer-run association.

Kristi Melanson Vogel from Port Colborne Pelina Initiative, and Niagara Central Airport manager David Devine also discussed their hopes for the city and the future of their organizations.

Led by chief administrative officer Robert Heil, city staff and councillors also discussed Port Colborne's strengths and weaknesses.

Mayor John Maloney said the city chose to develop the strategic plan on its own, rather hire a consultant.

"Consulting fees are very expensive and we feel we can do it without that expense," he said.

He said he hopes to develop "a very workable, do-able document or focus which will certainly see us through the next four years, but beyond as well."



ALLAN BENNER / QMI AGENCY NIAGARA

Port Colborne chief administrative officer Robert Heil leads the discussion during a strategic planning session on Saturday.

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"Consulting fees are very expensive and we feel we can do it without that expense," he said.

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■ I'VE BEEN THINKING

You are loved

PASTOR GARY TOMUCK

Wainfleet Congregational Christian Church

You often hear people say, maybe you have even said it yourself, I've made a real mess of my life, I hit bottom, then I found God.

Yet God was not the one who was lost. We were, and Jesus came to seek and to save the lost.

C.S. Lewis has said "I was no more seeking God than a mouse is seeking a cat." God is so in love with you that He gave His Son for you. Put your name in there: you are loved.

God's love is no more evident than in the story concerning Hosea and Gomer.

1. God's Pursuit: God's loyal love to His covenant people is symbolized by Hosea's pursuit of Gomer. Hosea's name means salvation and Gomer represents Israel in their unfaithfulness.

There are several interpretive challenges here. Namely this literal or allegorical with respect to Hosea 1:2 "Go take to yourself an adulteress wife and children of unfaithfulness because the land is guilty of the vilest adultery and departing from the Lord." Would

God sanction that special union between a man of God and a woman of the night? It certainly appears this way on a literal reading of Hosea 1:2. Others believe that this refers to spiritual infidelity rather than physical adultery. In other words Gomer became unchaste because like the Israelites in Hosea's day she became a worshipper of false gods.

We can say at the very least the adulteress wife Gomer and the faithful husband Hosea parallel the adulterous Israel and the faithful Lord. For idolatry is spiritual adultery. It is playing the harlot and God whose name mean jealous will punish it as we will see in a few minutes. Hosea was not only commanded by God to marry Gomer but also to look after children who were probably not his own. They would pattern their lives after their mother while still being married to him. The first son's name was Jezreel which means "God scatters" (Hosea 1:4). The second child was a daughter who was to be named Lo-Ruhmah which means "not loved" (vs 6) and then finally Gomer had another son called Lo-ammi which means "not my people" (vs 9). Didn't those names at one time fit every person before they became a

Christian? We were named Jezreel because we were also scattered, alienated, and separated from God. We were also named Lo-Ruhmah not loved.

You say God has always loved us. In one sense that is true but also at one time His wrath abided on us, when we followed the way of the world and our own father the devil. John Calvin said "God hated us while He loved us." Before Christ we were like the Israelites (Lo-Ammi) you are not my people, but after Christ they (you) will be called "sons of the living God."

This is all based upon the Lord's passionate pursuit of us. Even in our waywardness God goes hard after us. Giving our love to other things or to other people more than to God breaks his holy heart. Yet God's passionate love still motivates His relentless pursuit of us. You can feel it through His own words in Hosea 11:8 "How can I give you up? How can I hand you over? My heart has changed within me, all my compassion is aroused." This reminds of Christ who wept as many of His own people turned away from Him. He wanted to gather them as a hen gathers her chicks under her wings but they would not come.

In spite of our rebellion and in Hosea's pursuit of Gomer it happened again and again.

1. God's pursuit would lead to 2. Their Punishment: In Hosea 2:6 God say "Therefore I will block her path with thornbushes, I will wall her in so that she cannot find her way." And now this finally leads to 3. God's (Hosea's) purchase; Hosea redeemed his wife probably at a slave auction for 15 pieces of silver, five bushels of barley and a measure of wine which equalled 30 pieces of silver, the price of a slave. The same price that Judas sold Christ for whom inter redeemed us by His priceless blood.

We all were prodigal people at one time. We were like Gomer's children and even Gomer herself committing spiritual adultery until the Lord, the greater Hosea secured salvation for us. From Gomer to Hosea. And Christ the bridegroom forgave us and dressed us in white linen bright and pure. And now our only logical response is 4. Praise: "Let us rejoice and be glad and give Him the glory. For the wedding of the lamb has come and His bride has made herself ready." (Rev.19:7)

You are now called God's people, children of the living God — you are loved.

Shipwrecks — Atlantic Erie

SKIP GILLHAM

For QMI Agency Niagara

Atlantic Erie, a frequent traveler through the Welland Canal, ran aground early this year off Ile-des-Madeleine in the St. Lawrence River.

The ship was departing with a cargo of road salt on Jan. 11, 2015, when it stranded.

Fortunately, the vessel was not damaged and was pulled free by tugs at high tide. Following an inspection, the ship was able to continue the journey to deliver much needed winter road salt.

Atlantic Erie was built at Collingwood and

entered service in April 1965 for Canada Steamship Lines as the *Hon. Paul Martin*. This self-unloader was capable of Great Lakes as well as ocean service and often spent the winter months in saltwater service.

The name was changed to *Atlantic Erie* in 1988 and it spent considerable time in the gypsum trade along the Atlantic coast but has also worked on the Pacific and overseas to Germany and Holland.

On June 12, 2014, *Atlantic Erie* went aground off Port Colborne but was lightened and released on this occasion as well.



Atlantic Erie is shown in this undated photo.

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LOCAL NEWS

■ **POLITICS:** Capital deficit could add another \$234.5M by 2024

Region's debt at \$456.6M by year end

ROB HOULE
QMI Agency Niagara

Niagara Region is looking at \$456.6-million debt by year's end — and that could go up another \$234.5 million over the next nine years.

Regional councillors were given an overview on the region's 2015 capital budget during a recent budget review committee meeting.

If approved by council, that budget will total \$155.7 million, \$40 million of which will be borrowed.

A staff report includes a nine-year forecast that shows current levels of operational funding allotted to capital assets will continue to come up short, resulting in an additional \$234.5 million in debt by 2024.

"However, staff is committed to revisiting the capital program in 2015 in advance of the 2016 submission to ensure we present a balanced capital program going forward," Helen Chamberlain, the region's director of financial management and planning, and deputy treasurer, told councillors.

"And while we continue to advocate to other levels of government — maximize other contributions from federal and provincial partners — we certainly are going to look at opportunities to look within ourselves at means to mitigate that funding gap," Chamberlain said a yearly tax hike of 1.3% on the general levy over the next nine years, beginning in 2016, would eliminate the \$235-million gap.

Crimsby Mayor Bob Boudley wanted to know how the region ended up with such a forecasted capital fund-

BIG BUDGET CAPITAL PROJECTS FOR 2015

Welland water-treatment plant upgrades — \$18 million
Central Avenue Bridge Replacement — \$10.9 million
Court services — \$10 million
Port Colborne water treatment plant upgrade — \$6 million
Welland watermain East and West — \$6 million
Mountain Rd. reconstruction — \$5.2 million
King St. at Greenlane and Durham (roundabout) improvement — \$3.1 million
Ambulance and equipment replacement — \$1.970 million

ing gap.

"I remember discussions of a \$1.6 billion, 10-year capital program, and it was fully funded at one point, about two years ago," he said.

"So I don't know where the \$235-million deficit or shortfall comes from, unless we moved projects up or something, but it was fully funded at one time. \$1.6 billion in projects and \$1.3 billion in funding — that other \$300 million was found through a lot of work by finance and public works and others, and now we're going backwards."

Chamberlain said additional projects, such as \$50 million for long-term care facilities, the reconstruction of the Central Ave. bridge in Port Erie and construction of provincial offences court facilities in Welland and St. Catharines contributed to the

forecasted gap.

Emphasizing the 10-year capital projects plan was just a proposal, budget review committee of the whole chairman David Barrick, a regional councillor from Port Colborne, suggested the audit committee "take a closer look" at the plan once the 2015 budget process is put to bed.

rob.houle@summedia.ca
Twitter: RobH_Standard

WHERE WILL THE PROPOSED CAPITAL BUDGET BE SPENT?

\$58.9 million — transportation and fleet
\$31.2 million — wastewater
\$24.9 million — water
\$174 million — properties
\$7.2 million — Niagara Regional Police
\$5.5 million — Niagara Regional Housing
\$3.3 million — corporate services
\$3.2 million — waste management
\$2.3 million — Emergency Medical Services
\$1.9 million — long-term care homes

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LOCAL NEWS

■ **POLICING:** Petrowski wins seat as vice-chair

Gale elected police board chair

BILL SAWCHUK
QMI Agency/Niagara

Bob Gale has come full circle.

As a young man, he served as a constable with the Niagara Regional Police. Thirty years later, after leaving to forge a successful career in the family fuel business, he is back with the NRP — this time, as chairman of the police services board.

Gale was elected as the chair by a vote of 4-3 at last Thursday's first meeting of the new board.

"I'm pretty proud to be here," Gale said. "I've gone from cadet to chairman of the board. I am looking forward to it. We are here to achieve a purpose.

CRIME UPDATE

Niagara Regional Police Chief Jeff McGuire gave the police services board a rundown of crime in Niagara. He told the board there were three homicides in Niagara in 2014. One remains unsolved. There were 18 deadly collisions involving 20 fatalities for the year.

McGuire told the board there were 24 robberies in December. Ten have been cleared.

"I understand we can't get involved in operations, but these are our tax dollars and I want to know where they go."

Andy Petrowski was elected



**ANDY
PETROWSKI**



**BOB
GALE**

vice-chair by the same 4-3 vote. Both are rookies on the board.

Board veteran Vaughn Stewart also ran for chair. Another veteran, Ken Gansel, put his name forward for vice-chair.

The three new political appointees — regional councillors Gale, Petrowski and Dave Barrick — as well as

Terry Bonham, a civilian recently appointed by regional council, voted as a block for Gale and Petrowski.

The three experienced members appointed by the Ontario government for four-year terms — Stewart, Bob Marshall and Gansel — didn't.

"The board made a decision," Stewart said after the meeting.

"That's democracy."

The police services board is the civilian body that oversees the NRP and is responsible for the budget.

Gale said he would strive for transparency, honesty and integrity and emphasized the board will be fiscally responsible for the taxpayers, which was something Petrowski reiterated.

Gale said there is a lot of public interest in the police service and the board.

"I have already had questions from people about bad cops," Gale said. "I hate bad cops. The rank and file is stained by bad cops. There aren't many, but we have to weed them out."

"I hate like heck when an officer is still getting paid after they have been charged with a serious crime. You can't blame the chief, because we are governed by legislation, but let's work together and get some answers."

Petrowski said he takes his new role seriously.

"I believe in a fair wage for the police service, but it has to be bal-

QUESTIONS, QUESTIONS

The new members of the police services board wasted no time peppering the chief and his staff with questions Thursday.

Many were about board procedures and protocol. Others weren't.

Andy Petrowski left no doubt he wants body cameras on all officers, and Dave Barrick questioned the way a discretionary fund is spent. Board chair Bob Gale wondered about the relationship between the police and the District School Board of Niagara in light of a bomb threat at Sir Winston Churchill Secondary School earlier this month. He wanted to know what schools are doing to avoid copycats.

And Terry Bonham, a Steko operations management retiree who has experience working in a large, unionized environment, warned the board he had about 500 questions about police overtime procedures.

anced against the challenging economic times in the Niagara region."

Petrowski said he has three steps on who are police officers.

"I'm very mindful of the risks they put themselves through," he said. "They are in my prayers every day."

Bill.Sawchuk@summedia.ca
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■ **POLICING:** To be broadcast live on Tribune website

Chat with the Chief online

BILL SAWCHUK
QMI Agency Niagara

Policing is the one profession everyone has an opinion about.

Why do police patrol here and not there?

Why is the police budget so high? Why aren't there more officers on the street?

QMI Agency Niagara will help answer your policing questions with a monthly series of online conversations with Niagara Regional Police Chief Jeff McGuire. The show will take place monthly.

"Everybody cares about policing — and if they don't, they should," said Erica Bojer, managing editor of *The Standard* in St. Catharines. "Most people don't actually have an interaction with the police, but we want to know they are there for us."

"People care about the way the budget is spent, the way officers are deployed in the community and what things they spend their time on."

The show will provide a forum to ask the chief the questions you have

about policing in Niagara.

"We want to communicate with the public that we serve, and give them the opportunity to ask questions and provide input," McGuire said. "It gives me the opportunity to explain to them en masse about some of the things we do and some of the things we can't do."

Chat with the Chief will be broadcast on wellandtribune.ca.

Questions and comments can be submitted on Twitter using hashtag #AskMcGuire. The show will take place monthly.

"We wanted to give readers another way to get information about policing," Bojer said.

"This gives them access to the chief through us. It's another way to engage with our readers. We've been successful with our online broadcasts — our election live shows, our poverty discussions and the Adoptables — and this is another way to build on that."

Bill.Sawchuk@summedia.ca
Twitter: [Bill_Standard](https://twitter.com/Bill_Standard)

ONE NIGHT ONLY!

Buddy Holly "Dance Party" Show Comes to Port Colborne Theatre



International touring artist Jeff Giles comes to Port Colborne on Sunday February 8th.

A touch of Broadway is coming to Port Colborne when "Buddy Holly: The Rockin' Dance Party" headlines at the Roselawn Theatre on Sunday February 8 @ 3pm. This special matinee performance features the amazing talents of international touring artist Jeff Giles, best known for his starring role in "The Buddy Holly Story", the official musical show of the legendary Rock & Roll pioneer who died in a tragic plane crash on February 3, 1959. In Canada, Jeff Giles has starred as Buddy in Charlottetown PEI, where he was also featured on CBC television, and in Hamilton, where the show sold-out the prestigious Theatre Aquarius for a month. Of his performance there, the Hamilton Spectator described Jeff Giles as "the sexiest Buddy Holly ever".

Songs performed by Jeff Giles and the Memphis Cats band in the show feature all of Buddy's biggest hits including "Peggy Sue", "That'll Be the Day", "Rave On", "It's So Easy", "Everyday", "Oh Boy!", "Not Fade Away" and "True Love Ways" amongst the many audience favourites. As a special bonus, "Buddy Holly: The Anniversary Concert" also features music from the other headlining acts on the "Winter Dance Party" tour including The Big Bopper ("Chantilly Lace"), Ritchie Valens ("Oh Donna", "La Bamba"), plus Dion and the Belmonts (Why Must I Be a Teenager in Love").

Tickets to see Jeff Giles as Buddy Holly at the Port Colborne Roselawn Theatre are only \$29, available at # 905-834-7572 or the theatre box office located at 296 Fielden Avenue. Get your tickets early to ensure the best seats for this spectacular show!

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LOCAL NEWS



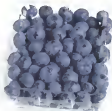
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■ SHIPPING

Study shows billions to be spent by seaway partners

DON FRASER
QMI Agency Niagara

It's boom time for Seaway investments.

A new study reveals more than \$7 billion is being spent on renewing assets and infrastructure improvements in the Great Lakes-St. Lawrence shipping system.

That report has been compiled by maritime trade consultants Martin Associates, reports \$7.1 billion in capital spending on ships, ports and terminals and waterway infrastructure in that system on both sides of the border.

It also amounts to the biggest renewal of system fleets in three decades, with \$4.1 billion being spent.

Among the big players is St. Catharines-based Algoma Central Corp., which is pouring about \$500 million into 10 new ships for its fleet in an investment that will last up to 40 years.

Its findings were officially released last Wednesday.

"At Algoma we're confident about the future of Great Lakes shipping," said company CEO and president Greg Wight. "It's encouraging to see the infrastructure renewal that's going on in the Welland Canal.

"It's a big part of what our trade is, moving goods from the inland to the St. Lawrence," he said.

A key reason for the new private investment is the Canadian government's removal of a 25% foreign vessel import duty in 2010.

"It allowed us to sign orders for vessels outside of Canada (in China), because there was no place to build them in Canada," he said. "So there was a lot of pent-up demand and need for new vessels."

Since 2009, Algoma has had 10 vessels on order — six have been delivered with four more to come.

Six of those are state-of-the-art, highly fuel efficient ships of the Equinox variety. The other four are two new product tankers and two coastal vessels.

"This investment for us is certainly looking well into the future," Wight said.

Among an improved regulatory climate pointed to in the study is one by New York state to not move ahead with extremely stringent standards for ballast water-treatment systems.

It had been argued the move would have effectively blocked marine ships

SOME SEAWAY-GREAT LAKES INVESTMENTS IN THE U.S. AND CANADA

* more than \$4.8 billion invested in the navigation system from 2009-2013 and another \$2.3 billion is committed to improvements from 2014-2018.

* 67% of the capital was invested by private companies with 33% coming from government funding

* Canadian, American and international ship owners are spending \$4.1 billion on the biggest renewal of the Great Lakes-St. Lawrence fleets in 30 years, 56% (\$2.3-billion) comes via Canadian ship owners.

* The Canadian and U.S. federal governments, through the St. Lawrence Seaway Management Corp. and Saint Lawrence Seaway Development Corp., have dedicated almost \$1 billion to modernize the Seaway's lock infrastructure and technology over a decade — the Seaway's most significant transformation in five decades.

* Great Lakes and St. Lawrence River ports and terminals are collectively investing more than \$1.8 billion on expanding their docks, equipment, facilities and intermodal connections

-Chamber of Marine Commerce release

from passing through the St. Lawrence Seaway.

"It wasn't always this way, especially with the recession of 2009 and the challenges we had hanging over our heads," said Stephen Brooks, president of the Chamber of Marine Commerce, which is a bi-national association that represents more than 150 marine industry stakeholders.

Brooks said the study shows "if we build it in the right regulatory climate, investment will come."

"We're ecstatic with the results of this study, we knew there was a fair bit of money both public and private that was going into the system."

The results of the "Infrastructure Investment Survey of the Great Lakes and St. Lawrence Seaway System" can be downloaded at www.marinedelivers.com

don.fraser@smmedia.ca
Twitter @don_standard

LOCAL NEWS

RELIGION

Parent files new complaint against DSBN

DON FRASER
QMI Agency Niagara

A Grimsby man is again taking on District School Board of Niagara over its perceived religious connections.

In November 2013 — his second action against the board — Rene Chouinard filed an Ontario Human Rights Code complaint arguing the board "continues to exhibit preferences for Protestant Christianity" at its facilities, to the exclusion of other creeds and religious beliefs.

He said the most obvious example is Eden High School in St. Catharines and its Protestant ties.

The complaint said the board has "continued to allow other missionary organizations, including Habitat for Humanity, to operate Christian mission activities within its programs."

In his first action Chouinard, an atheist, successfully took the board to the Human Rights Tribunal of Ontario for allowing distribution of religious materials in its schools. In August 2013, the DSBN was ordered to stop allowing distribution of third-party religious materials in schools unless it developed a new, non-discriminatory policy for all creeds, including atheists.

The tribunal said a DSBN revised policy did not treat all creeds fairly and ensure neutrality and non-discrimination.

The board has complied with that order and no longer allows such distributions in its schools.

On Monday, a hearing on the most recent complaint was held before the tribunal in St. Catharines.

The tribunal adjourned to rule on the issue of Chouinard's standing — whether or not he has the right to take the complaint to tribunal.

That written decision is expected to be made shortly.

In an interview afterward, Chouinard said he was "a little surprised that the issue of standing required as much discussion as it did."

"I have a kid in one of those schools," he said.

In describing its effect on him, Chouinard writes in his complaint the board's activities exposed him to abuse and "character assassination in the local media and community."

Among other effects he alleges are that there has been harm to his three children in that they have perceived Christianity as the norm in DSBN schools, and that "concepts of non-belief were not

respected."

He is seeking \$50,000 in compensation from the school board to run a long-term media campaign promoting the validity of secular humanism.

His non-monetary remedy, among a number of demands, is to have Eden disbanded and either rebranded as a secular facility or closed.

Chouinard also requests the DSBN discontinue its DSBNI (International) home building program activities with Habitat, unless it can show it's engaged in similar activities with secular humanist organizations.

On its website, Eden High School describes its privately funded Spiritual Life Centre as providing a "meaningful program to assist in the development and support of Eden's students — through a rich array of life activities."

That centre describes its mandate as "leading students to learn of Christ and live for Christ."

Through its lawyer, the board states in its response Eden is compliant with ministry regulations on religious instruction being extracurricular.

JULIE JOCSAK QMI AGENCY NIAGARA

Rene Chouinard, shown with his wife Anna, has filed a complaint against the District School Board of Niagara.

ular and outside the instructional day.

Students also choose whether or not to go to Eden, which has no geographical catchment area.

It is also a student's choice whether to attend chapel or utilize life centre services, which is privately funded and compliant under the Education Act.

DSBN said its affiliation with Habitat for Humanity is not religious nor missionary in nature, but educational.

The reply maintains the DSBN neither supports nor objects to any specific creed.



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LOCAL NEWS

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■ ALBA DICENSO

Welland native named to Order of Canada

ALLAN BENNER
 QMI Agency Niagara

Despite her many accomplishments in her career as a registered nurse and educator, Alba DiCenso's focus was always on helping people.

"She is completely devoted to not only her work, but just helping. It's her nature to be helping the community," said her brother, Pelham resident Albert DiCenso.

Now, the woman who grew up in Welland is becoming a member of the Order of Canada.

"The Order of Canada is something that is just so perfect for her — the fact that she wants to do the best she can to help Canada as a whole."

Alba, who could not be reached for comment Sunday, is retired from a career as a professor at McMaster University's School of Nursing and Department of Clinical Epidemiology and Biostatistics.

Her research into evidence-based nursing and contributions to the development of nurse practitioners earned her Canada's highest civilian award, announced Thursday by Governor General David Johnston.

In a media release issued by the university, Alba said she is "deeply hon-

oured and grateful."

"I have had the privilege to lead research to evaluate the expanding role of nurse practitioners and to facilitate their effective integration in Canada's health system," she said.

"It has also been most rewarding to develop resources to help nurses apply emerging research evidence in their practice, to train a new generation of nurse researchers and to see my research reflected in public policy."

Alba, an international leader in the introduction and promotion of evidence-based practice, was co-founder of the Canadian Centre for Evidence-Based Nursing as well as founder and lead editor of the Evidence-Based Nursing Journal published by the British Medical Journal and the Royal College of Nursing in the U.K.

The awards ceremony will be held at Rideau Hall in Ottawa.

alba.benner@munmedia.ca
 Twitter: @abennor1



ALBA DICENSO

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LOCAL NEWS

RENEWABLE ENERGY

Shares for sale in solar co-op

ROB HOWLE

QW Agency/Niagara

Elizabeth Chitty and Tung Trinh are in the solar-generated electricity business.

While their involvement in renewable energy is on a small scale, they are part of a larger movement. The St. Catharines residents are the bond holders in a co-op that pools money to build rooftop and small ground-mount installations to harness the power of the sun.

Chitty and Trinh are investors in SolarShare, a renewable energy co-op launched in 2011 that owns approximately \$30 million in solar assets. Chitty and Trinh are among the co-op's 750 members who have invested more than \$10 million in solar projects across the province, such as the solar panel installations above the Value Village building on Ontario St. in St. Catharines.

"Unfortunately, I don't have much money to invest. But any that I do, my criteria is that it be a triple-bottom-line one," Chitty said.

"Triple-bottom-line is an accounting framework that is social, environmental and financial. So in other words, instead of your commitments just from the point of view what it's going to make you, you think about the social and environmental returns as well."

"It's called the three P's — people, planet and profit. Those are the three pillars of sustainability."

Chitty said she bought a minimum \$1,000 SolarShare bond after receiving a small inheritance about three years ago. Over the five-year term, she will receive a fixed yearly 5% return on her investment, with dividends paid out twice yearly. After five years, she has the option of withdrawing her investment.

SolarShare works like this. The not-for-profit co-operative signs

ON THE WEB

For more information on TREC, go to www.trec.on.ca

For more information, including how to invest with SolarShare, go to www.solarbonds.ca

leases with building owners or land-owners, installs solar panels on commercial rooftops or in fields and then sells bonds to environmentally conscious investors or those simply looking for a good return on investment.

The return on investment is paid from revenue from the electricity generated from the solar panels that is sold to the province under 20-year feed-in tariff (FIT) contracts.

It's the type of investment sought out by Trinh.

"I'm really into ecological work, and like to invest in ethical stocks," Trinh said.

Investing in SolarShare was no brainier, he said, so he bought \$5,000 in bonds approximately two years ago.

"I plan to invest more," Trinh said.

"I wanted to make an initial investment and see how things are with the bonds. I plan to invest much more, because I find the 5% interest very attractive."

The solar panels atop the Wynne Family Industries building on Ontario St., installed in November 2012, is hardly noticeable from street level. But up above Value Village and Cheers Tap and Grill are a plethora of solar panels tilted toward the south. The \$821,500, 124-kilowatt St. Catharines project is expected to generate \$102,000 annually.

SolarShare was created by TREC Renewable Energy Co-operative, an incubator and developer of renewable energy co-operatives. TREC's first co-operative was WindShare, whose 400 members share in the profits from the wind-generator at Exhibition Place in Toronto.

"We essentially use the co-op model to enable citizens of Ontario to invest in renewable energy," said Judith Lipp, executive director of TREC and president of the Federation of Community Power Co-ops.

"Rather than have a corporation retain the profits — and it's not

shared with the public — the co-op basically sells the investment to the general public ... and they get paid a return on that investment," Lipp said.

"Essentially, they become co-owners in the system."



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HANDOUT PHOTO

The SolarShare solar-panel project atop the Value Village building on Ontario St. in St. Catharines.

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COMMUNITY

Walkers raise \$65,000 to help fight against Alzheimer's disease

GRANT LAFLECHE
QMI Agency Niagara

More than 300 walkers made their way around Brock University Sunday afternoon for the 11th annual Walk for Memories event, to support the Niagara chapter of the Alzheimer Society.

It raised \$65,000, and chapter CEO Teena Kindt said a few thousand more dollars was expected to come in through a penny sale and other events at the university Sunday.

"So I think we'll end up being around \$70,000," she predicted.

Walkers collected pledges for the event, which saw them navigate a figure 8 route through the university.

According to Alzheimer Society statistics, more than 8,600 Niagara residents are suffering from progressive dementia, the most common of which is Alzheimer's disease.

Kindt said the society is trying to drive the message that 72% of people with Alzheimer's are women, principally because they live longer than men.

In 70% of families, women are the caregivers, so if they fall prey to the disease it can seriously disrupt the family unit, Kindt said.

"So we are really focused on talking to women in their 40s to be aware of the warning signs of Alzheimer's disease," he said.

The society had aimed to raise \$75,000 for this year's walk and hopes people will continue to donate online.

"Our website for the walk will be open until early February," Kindt said.

The Niagara chapter must raise about \$500,000 annually to keep its programming at its current level.

Although 65% of the funding it gets comes from government sources, Kindt said the society hasn't received an increase in that assistance for three years. So it must raise the rest, including raising money to cover rising expenses.

For more information or to donate, visit www.walkformemories.ca.



GRANT LAFLECHE / QMI AGENCY NIAGARA

Walkers at Brock University raised \$65,000 for the Alzheimer Society Niagara chapter Sunday at the 11th annual Walk for Memories.

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IN BRIEF

Port Colborne woman wins lottery prize

A Port Colborne woman plans to invest in a new house after winning a LOTTO 6/49 prize.

Viola Jeffrey won \$125,140.90 from the Jan. 10 6/49 draw.

"I was at home when I decided to go

online to check my numbers," Jeffrey said while at the OLG Prize Centre in Toronto recently, where she picked up her winnings. "I noticed some of the numbers matching and then I saw I also had the bonus number. I started screaming with joy. I'm still shocked and I can't believe I'm sitting here at the Prize Centre."

The winning ticket was purchased at the Clarence St. Shoppers Drug Mart in Port Colborne.

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LOCAL NEWS

■ **TOURISM:** Website, video launched to attract riders to Niagara

Peddling region to cycling tourists

DAN DAKIN
QMI Agency Niagara

Venture Niagara has put the wheels in motion to get more cyclists visiting Niagara.

After hiring a cycling tourism co-ordinator last year, the publicly funded economic development agency has launched a new website and promotional video, and is planning to open a cyclo-tourism centre to help bring more visitors to Niagara.

The four-minute-long video, produced by JLM Studio of St. Catharines, features cyclists riding the bike paths, trails and roads around the region, and then taking in some of the sites such as wineries and Niagara Falls.

Nearly every municipality is represented in the video, which Venture Niagara community economic development manager Sue Morin said was one of the big goals when filming started last summer.

"I was pretty well blown away when I saw the finished product. It was exactly what I had dreamed up, but I didn't know if it was possible," she said.

Filming took place over three months using volunteer cyclists covering various ages



and types of riding.

At a launch event in St. Catharines last Thursday morning, Morin said research conducted over the past year showed cycling tourists coming to Niagara stay an average of about three nights and spend more than \$1,000.

Venture Niagara compared the region to some of the world's top cycling destinations such as Amsterdam,

Copenhagen, Portland, Tokyo, Montreal and Melbourne to find out what the region could be doing better.

"In some of these places, cars are No. 2 behind bicycles," Morin said.

The Niagara Cycle Tourism Centre came as a result of that research. Located at Venture Niagara's Pine St. offices in Thorold, the NCTC will act as a central hub for incoming

cyclists looking for information.

While funding for the cycling tourism co-ordinator position, the new website and promotional video came from the Ministry of Training, Colleges and Universities, Venture Niagara found out Wednesday it has received around \$77,000 worth of funding through FedDev Ontario to run the cycle tourism centre until March 2016.

Cycling legend Steve Bauer,

who grew up in Fenwick and went on to win a cycling silver at the Olympics and wore the yellow jersey in the Tour de France, said Thursday the website is smart move.

"They've been working on the infrastructure for years. It's nicer to cycle in Niagara than ever before with bike lane improvements. This is

another big step forward to have this collaboration," he said.

The website has information for cyclists looking to come to Niagara including a wide variety of bike routes that can be downloaded to a bike computer, information on where to find bike-friendly food and lodging options, what the local cycling clubs and teams are, and where to go for washrooms or bike repairs.

Bauer said the site and video will help promote the lesser-known destinations.

"Most people think of Niagara as being Niagara Falls or Niagara-on-the-Lake for a destination, but there's so much more west that's pretty exciting," he said.

Asked what needs to happen next to improve cycling in the region, Morin said she would like to see more standardized signs used for hike routes.

"Yes, keep up the good work with the roads, but we need to have one big message in Niagara with signage," she said. To see the new website, visit www.niagaracyclingtourism.com.

dan.dakin@summedia.ca
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LOCAL NEWS

■ **PEOPLE:** 'If you want a regular portrait, go to Walmart,' says Welland digital illustrator and photographer T. Lee Kindy

Picture this

GAEG FUMINGER
QMI Agency Niagara

He will tie the people to trees with cellophane, paint lines all over their face and body and get them to strip down to their skivvies to pose with a mirror.

People are coming out of the woodwork to let him do it.

Welland photographer T. Lee Kindy is turning a lot of heads these days with his art.

"I like to think of myself as more of a photo illustrator, a conceptual photographer," he says from his wartime home off Lincoln St.

"It's a technique I've developed over about three years — and the first ones (photos) were horrific."

Kindy can remember experimenting with old film cameras at a young age growing up in Sarnia.

"It was just something my dad was into. He had a darkroom, and it was something — was going into all the time — usually breaking things," he quips.

"I just started taking pictures, nothing good. I was a bit of a loner," he says of hours spent by himself out shooting trees or water, often snapshots of people.

"It's your friend — you bring it with you, it's something to do."

A graduate of Lambton College's radio-television-journalism program, he later shot weddings on the cheap for people who couldn't afford pricey photographers.

But while the camera was his faithful companion for so many years, Kindy found himself married and soon later with growing young family.

He cast aside his lens and film to focus on the boys' upbringing and his job.

"I kind of missed the digital revolution," he says.

He has now spent the past 13 years in Welland with his wife Angela of 21 years and their now two teenage boys. He first relocated to the Rose City as an employee of the Canadian Tire store chain.

His introduction to the "instant gratification" of digital photography — and now his forte — came at a store Christmas party while he was recording the festivities on film. Someone handed him a Canon Rebel. It didn't have the slow, klunky speeds of early point-and-shoot digital cameras.

He was hooked.

"I had to get back into it."

But as in the days of old, toiling with developer in a room with a red light bulb, Kindy is most interested in what he can do to a photo after he takes it. He has always been interested in the production side of photography — "the darkness is where the magic happens."

His darkroom of today, however, is a kitchen table with the lights on, a movie plugged into the TV in the background while he manipulates his digital images on a laptop computer loaded with Adobe Photoshop.

He calls what he does with his photos "digital painting."

Many images are masterfully heavy on contrast. He can change a nighttime winter scene into day. He cuts, pastes, crops, duplicates.

His artwork includes a Bell phone both series, zombie pinups, Fun with Food. He can turn people into animals, put them in places they wouldn't dare tread in day-to-day living.

"I like to think of it as ordinary people doing extraordinary things."

"It's basically photogra-

phy without limits. Anything you can come up with, I can basically make happen," says Kindy, always up for a challenge.

"Creativity is born out of boredom or repetition, he adds.

"I definitely push the boundaries. I've been kicked off of Facebook a half a dozen times."

It's on the social networking site that perhaps Kindy has become most popular these days with his Whole Woman and Whole Man series for which people pose behind an ornate, oval, gold-framed mirror — he picked it up for a buck at the Goodwill store where he now works of Plymouth Rd. He edits his shots to reproduce within the mirror the background of the people he photographs — you can see through them, essentially.

People have been lining up to be included in the series, a handful willing to be shot in the snow.

"It's basically snowballed," he says of the series.

Although he has a Facebook page for his photos — Hard Kindy Portraits — many keep up to date on Kindy's work through his personal page, which boasts more than 1,200 "friends."

Occasionally he'll put out a request for title suggestions for his work, offering the person who comes up with his favourite a free copy of the image.

"People like to be part of something 'dangerous,' without actually being part of it," he says, referring to the at times risqué or edgy subject matter.

He won't photograph anything he wouldn't do himself — which may not be saying much, given that after one



T. LEE KINDY/SUPPLIED PHOTO

Pictured is a self portrait of Welland digital illustrator and photographer T. Lee Kindy.

person requested photos of needles piercing their skin, he made sure he tried it first.

For one recent Facebook post that requested someone wanting to be photographed with a bullet in their mouth, it took minutes for someone to come forward.

One Saturday he wandered on Facebook if someone was willing to be Saran-wrapped to a tree. By early afternoon he was shooting a whole group of volunteers.

"I like to think the quality's there," he says of what ensues from his eccentric ideas. "I'm not just a weird guy with a camera."

Kindy strives for art-gallery-calibre material. He relishes the suggestion his work is very commercial.

"I love the art part of it, but ultimately I'd like to make money," he says.

For now his \$50 sitting fees and \$10 charge per digital file is just pocket change on top of his Goodwill salary.

Too many people expect his work to be free.

Photography now has basically covered his costs. His

gear, including his sidekick Nikon D300s, is paid for.

He has no studio.

"I set up a blanket in the backyard, or go to the woods, or remove the background with Photoshop."

Kindy is not shy about snapping stranger's photos, but he admits he is uncomfortable striking up a random conversation. But in developing skills to put people at ease in front of his lens, the quirky persona he projects has helped him to become more comfortable talking with others.

"Everybody thinks they're a model, and I can bring that out."

Kindy at 5-foot-4 "and a half" may be small in stature, but comes across as someone with a big, genuine heart.

He is easily noticeable in a crowd — intentionally so — by his long, greying hair and thick Van Dyke beard.

He always carries his business cards — his darthkindy@hotmail.com e-mail address reflects his love of all things Star Wars.

Among his other loves — The Black Lantern Experience.

Once an underground arts movement, BLX, as its known, has taken Welland by storm over the past year, leading to city honours, a downtown gallery project and recently a popup store donated by Sea-way Mall. The BLX group he was instrumental in founding, he says, is his greatest achievement behind his college diploma, marriage and children.

What's next for the group? His admirers will have to wait and see.

The same holds true for his own photography, lately pertaining to models in a broad range of job-site masks.

"People always say, 'What's the next series, Lee?' I don't know."

For now, and as always, he's open to suggestions. To new challenges.

"Unique portraits for unique people — that's kind of my motto," he says.

"If you want a regular portrait, go to Walmart."

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LOCAL NEWS

■ AGING

Pacemaker rejuvenates 105-year-old

ALLAN BENNER
QMI Agency Niagara

She has a look of anticipation in her bright eyes as her caregiver hands her a Hohner accordion, tarnished with age.

Elena Turroni smiles as her nimble fingers easily pick out the notes on the antique instrument.

A cheerful old tune rings from the accordion. Its finish has faded in the 80 years Turroni has owned it, but the sounds it produces are vibrant.

She said her father, Tommaso DiMartile, taught her to play the instrument when she was eight years old.

She smiles as she recalls sitting at her father's side, watching him play.

She said a smaller watch at the time, just big enough for a child. And she'd try to follow along as her father played, learning to play the accordion herself in the process.

That was in 1918, and she's been entertaining friends and family, playing the accordion, ever since.

Turroni was born in Welland on Jan. 20, 1910. Yes, she's 105.

"After all — after all its many years of faithfully hearing in her chest — her big, curving heart finally began to slow down."

Her grandson, Mike Belcastro, said Turroni's family became concerned when they noticed that she was tiring quickly and lacked the strength to do the things she has always enjoyed.

"She was in the hospital awhile ago and we couldn't figure out what was wrong with her," Belcastro said.

Her heart rate had slowed to about 30 beats per minute. It should be about 50. And about four times a day, it stopped entirely for a second or so at a time.

After conducting tests, Turroni's cardiologist, Dr. Robert Mackett, told her family she should not see no reason why she couldn't have a pacemaker.

"Everyone thought her heart was good enough for that," Belcastro said, adding Mackett, who performed the

procedure, is "an amazing person."

"He walked me through the procedure a few times to make sure that I was comfortable with it," Belcastro said.

Turroni arrived at the St. Catharines hospital on Jan. 12 at about 10 a.m. to have the procedure done an hour later. By about 5:30 p.m. that day, Turroni was back in her Welland home.

It was the first time Turroni had ever seen the new St. Catharines hospital, which opened in March, 2013. Despite her age, Belcastro said his grandmother is normally healthy enough that she doesn't need to spend much time visiting hospitals.

Belcastro said Mackett told him she was the oldest patient he knows of in the country who has had a pacemaker implanted.

While Turroni might be the oldest Canadian with a pacemaker, she's not the oldest in the world to have the procedure done.

Jamie Antoniou, a spokesperson for the Guinness World Records North America office in New York City, said the current record-holder for the oldest person fitted with a pacemaker is David Henderson of Laurence-Kirk, Kincairdineshire, Scotland.

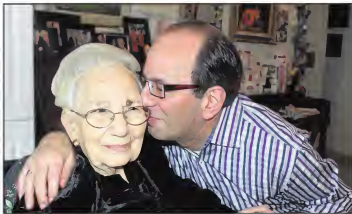
"He was 107 years old when he had a pacemaker fitted in 1997," Antoniou wrote in an e-mail.

Dr. Stafford Dohbin from Heart Niagara said having the procedure done at Turroni's age is rare "only because a limited number of the population reach 105."

"I think Dr. Mackett is to be congratulated for seeing that age need not be a limiting factor for treating heart disease," Dohbin added.

"The older you get, there's an increased risk of everything, but Dr. Mackett quite rightly did not regard age as something that would hold him back from treating someone the way they should be treated."

Since the procedure, Belcastro said he's noticed a renewed vigour in his grand-



Elena Turroni, 105, gets a kiss on the cheek from her grandson Mike Belcastro, celebrating her 105th birthday.

mother.

"She's driving her caregivers nuts because she doesn't want to go to bed at 9 p.m. anymore, she's up until two o'clock in the morning."

Turroni wants to go out shopping and visit friends and relatives — things she didn't have the strength to do before.

"She wants to go out to the mall everyday," added Belcastro, president of the nearby Seaway Mall.

That renewed energy is a common result of having a pacemaker implanted, regardless of the patient's age, Dohbin explained.

"Any one who has a pulse deficit... is going to feel lively, and an implanted pacemaker is the obvious way to go," he said. "Once the pacemaker has been inserted, people obviously feel a great deal better."

"If everybody was able to look after themselves properly from adolescence on, many more people would live to 105."

Asked how she feels after the procedure, Turroni replied: "I'm old."

"Old, old," she added, smiling.

Although the pacemaker has given her renewed strength, Turroni would still

prefer to be more active than she is.

"I can't be active because both my legs are gone," she complained.

Arthritis makes it too painful to get around like she used to, Belcastro explained.

But Turroni wants to go dancing like she did years ago with her late husband, Sam.

"I used to have fun. I loved dancing, playing my accordion," she recalled.

Turroni, who resided in Welland, still has many cousins, nieces and nephews living in the city, including Welland Ward 4 Councillor Pat Chiochio, her great-nephew, who congratulated Turroni on her birthday during Tuesday's Welland city council meeting.

Most of Turroni's descendants, however, have since moved all over North America, now living in Toronto, Windsor, Calgary, Los Angeles and San Francisco.

Belcastro is the only one of Turroni's six grandchildren and 10 great-grandchildren still living in Welland.

Nevertheless, she said her many old friends keep her busy, such as Mary Mollica, who stopped by to visit Turroni Monday for an early birthday celebration.

The two women were char-

ter members of Regina Lodge No. 20, Welland's chapter of the Order of the Son of Italy.

"On May 1965, at the Barclay Hotel we received our charter," Mollica recalled, referring to a long-gone establishment in the city.

Turroni was already 55 years old at the time, while Mollica was 35.

Mollica told Turroni she looks far younger than her birth certificate would suggest.

Turroni smiled and said: "I never wore makeup. No lipstick. Nothing."

With the help of Phoebe Bultaito, her live-in caregiver, Turroni still lives relatively independently in her Welland home, adorned with numerous oil paintings she's created over the years. Most of the paintings are images of landscapes and the familiar faces of her loved ones.

"I used to do a lot of painting," she said, although she hasn't picked up her paint brush recently.

But she still loves to cook. Turroni spent much of her long life as a chef, running a catering business as well as sharing her talent with viewers of a local televised cooking show. And about 15 years ago, she was featured on an episode of the *Loving Spoonfuls*

television program.

She's also published numerous cookbooks.

Even now, she still prepares her own meals.

"Oh, I throw something together," she said when asked about her love for cooking.

Belcastro recalled a recent visit from family members from Los Angeles.

"My cousins had never made gnocchi with ricotta. I told them how to make it," he said.

While they were preparing the pasta, Turroni asked, "What are you doing?"

"She started showing them how to make it," Belcastro explained. "You have to roll out the pasta and cut it. They couldn't do it, so she did."

"My cousins were in shock. They weren't expecting that."

Turroni said she still loves pasta, especially with garlic and olive oil rather than marinara sauce. And a healthy diet of good Italian food, she speculated, might have helped her remain healthy for such a long time.

Now, Turroni's family is wondering if she might outlive even her grandchildren.

Belcastro recalled a recent telephone conversation with his cousin.

"He called me and said, 'I was the lawyer's today'."

"I said, 'Why?'"

"He said, 'The same reason you should go'."

"I said, 'What happened?'"

"He said, 'Oh, I put Grandma in my will,'" Belcastro said, laughing.

Monday, as her friends celebrated her birthday, Turroni was asked what she wished for after she blew out the five candles on her cake.

"I wished that everybody will be happy and still love me the way they used to," she replied.

While it's supposed to be hard luck to share your birthday wish, Mollica told her old friend she has nothing to worry about.

"Your wish has been granted," Mollica said.

allan.benner@summedia.ca
Twitter: @abnwr1

LOCAL NEWS

MUSIC

Not the usual love song, or story

JOHN LAW
QMI Agency Niagara

It's something Vallyary Hal-laday said she has done hundreds of times before.

Only this time, she did it differently. Why, she can't explain.

On July 20, she was at a pool party at her boyfriend Kirk Thomas' house in Niagara Falls. They had been going together about a month and a half, and were falling for each other hard. The party was meant to introduce their families.

As Kirk went to greet his parents at the front door, Vallyary decided to cool off by diving into the pool. Only, she misjudged how shallow it was and her head collided hard with the bottom.

"Usually when I dive, my hands are always in front of me," she says. "So I hit it, can push myself back up. Or break

whatever it is. But for some reason... my hands weren't there."

There was a sickening snap. Then brutal pain.

"I remember my neck breaking," she says. "The first thing that went through my head was, 'I'm going to drown,' because I didn't realize anyone was in the pool."

Her friend saw what happened and grabbed her arm. At the front door, Kirk heard the commotion and raced back to the pool to see his girlfriend being "dead lifted" out of the water.

"I ran over to her mom and asked 'What happened?' She just turned to me and said, 'Call 911 right away! I was in a panic.'"

Laying on the deck, Vallyary went in and out of consciousness. Her mother desperately tried to keep her awake.

"I noticed in the corner of my eye she was holding my

hand. That's when I told her, 'Mom, I can't feel you. I can't feel anything.'"

At the hospital, she knew the news wouldn't be good. But she had to hear it from a passing nurse.

"I told her, 'Tell me straight, am I ever going to walk again?' And she just shook her head. I cried. Oh, I bawled."

Vallyary, a 23-year-old LCBO employee from Grimsby, had torn a portion of her spinal cord and snapped her neck. She was looking at the rest of her life in a wheelchair. Feeling guilty and furious with herself, she apologized to her friends and family, and attempted to break up with Kirk.

"I was pretty much saying, 'You didn't sign up for this. You've got to chance to walk out of here.'"

No chance. Thomas, a 27-year-old musician, stayed by her side and channelled his

emotions into a song. When he first played his acoustic ballad Can't Imagine for her, she still couldn't talk and was eating through tubes. Even crying hurt, but she couldn't help herself.

"I wanted him to play it over and over again. I've always been very supportive of his music, telling him 'Keep writing, keep playing.'"

Thomas wrote the song to boost her morale. But months later, he saw a new use for it.

A new bed for Vallyary will cost about \$12,000. A new commode will be \$5,000. Renovations to her mother's house, where she's staying, will be about \$87,000. Even her basic no frills electric wheelchair costs about \$30,000.

She has applied for help and funding for all of these expenses, but has so far been told she doesn't qualify. "Not needy enough," was one

excuse, she recalls.

Knowing the financial hardships ahead, Thomas put his song on iTunes at 99 cents per download, with all funds going to a trust fund for Vallyary's expenses once she is released from the Hotel Dieu Shaver Rehabilitation Centre, where she has been since late November.

Shortly after he uploaded the song, Thomas received word from iTunes that it was among the Top 10 downloads for his genre (alternative folk) this past weekend.

After the past five months, it was ecstatic news. They both cling to anything positive.

Vallyary's first Christmas in a wheelchair was emotional and exhausting.

"I got tired after opening one or two gifts," she says.

"People went overboard with the tape! So I used my mouth. After opening two gifts Kirk had to take over because I was so tired."

"Near the end I started crying because I didn't want to leave, but yet I was tired. My body was like, 'We need to get to bed.'"

Life since the accident has felt like a blur for Thomas, who gets an uneasy feeling just looking at his pool now. It was a big part of the reason he bought the house a year ago.

"I've been in it once after the accident, and it just doesn't feel the same," he says. "From here on out, if I have friends over to go in the pool, I've got to keep an eye on every little thing now."

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JOHN LAW / QMI AGENCY NIAGARA

Niagara Falls musician Kirk Thomas has uploaded a new song to iTunes to help pay for the huge expenses awaiting his girlfriend Vallyary, who broke her neck in a pool accident last summer.



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■ **MUSIC:** Welland's Ashlynnne Vince

Rising star takes aim at American top 40 pop chart

JOHN LAW
QMI Agency Niagara

It's a Wednesday morning and the first question for Ashlynnne Vince is ... isn't this a school day?

The Welland teen laughs and says, yes, she'll be returning to Welland Centennial Secondary School next month. But she's hardly been truant. While setting the stage for pop stardom these past few months in Nashville she's been taking online courses to keep up.

In between geography and English she's juggling studio time, songwriting and photo shoots. And that last one is proving problematic this week. With last Thursday's release of her single *Hold on to Love*, her manager is trying to have new publicity photos ready. Which probably wasn't the best time to get a soccer ball to the face.

Sometimes, being a teen gets in the way of being a teen singer.

"It was really bad," she says. "I had a big goose egg on my chin."

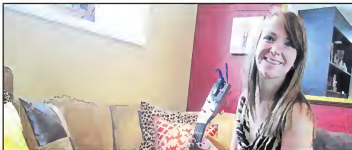
If her hunch pays off, there

won't be time for soccer soon. Or much of anything else. Hold on to *Love*, a vaguely '90s-ish pop song, will be her formal introduction to top 40 stations across the U.S. With a big push by her management at Plateau Music, the polished star is everything her career has been building towards.

All five years of it. "When she turned 16, her birthday print was flying out to Nashville," says mom Loralee Vince. "She had the bug. I had the bug too. She's always been involved in music and puts the effort in. I can get behind anyone who puts the effort in."

When she was 12, Ashlynnne took the stage at Fonthill's Urban Steakhouse for open mic night, singing Tom Petty's *Free Fallin'* and Carrie Underwood's *Before He Cheats*. Her family already knew she could sing, but they weren't expecting her stage presence.

"Every time she's on stage, whether it's at The Urban or downtown Nashville, everyone stops what they're doing and goes, 'Who's that singing?'"



JOHN LAW/QMI AGENCY NIAGARA

Welland's Ashlynnne Vince makes her play for pop stardom with the release of her single *Hold on to Love* to Top 40 radio. The teen recently returned from an internship at a Nashville music studio.

She returned most every week, eventually catching the attention of a local promoter who wanted her to star in a Taylor Swift tribute show. While crooning *Fifteen* and *Dear John*, she was also busy writing her own country songs. It paid off in 2011 when she won rising star at the Niagara Music Awards.

At 16, she made eight trips to Nashville, recording her debut CD *Tidal Wave* at CTM

Studios. It was there she was spotted by studio engineer Rebekah Lang, who bent the ear of Tennessee music stable Plateau Music.

The company already had a proven track record with young stars such as Sam Austin and Bobby Brooks Willms. In Vince, CEO/executive producer Tony Mankor saw a teen star in the making.

But Vince knew one thing had to change: Country songs.

Besides the inevitable comparisons to Taylor Swift, her heart wasn't into it anymore.

"People can say, 'You're not country enough,' but they can't say, 'You're not pop enough.'"

In August, she left for Nashville with her mom, sister and dog for a four-month internship at music studio The Tracking Room. While her friends were back at school, she was getting a different kind of education.

"When I go to a concert and I see people singing along to that person's stuff, it just makes me want to be on stage looking out to a crowd," she says. "Getting the satisfaction of them just knowing my stuff. That's what's pushing me ... that would be the best feeling in the world."

Facing a possible career-making week, mom Loralee is keeping her closer than ever. She has seen enough of the music biz's "sketchy" side.

"She doesn't go anywhere unless I'm with her," she says. "I handle all her e-mails. But we're really comfortable with Tony Mankor ... he's not just a manager, he's helping to develop all aspects of the business."

"I'm really confident in Ashlynnne's choices because she's always been level-headed (She's my best friend, interjects Ashlynnne). She's aware of some of the pit falls and dangers."

"We've watched Miley Cyrus go through her phases and we've talked about it a lot."

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